

Finally, ... be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Ephesians 6:10

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It's a business worth more than \$70,000,000,000 annually just in Canada alone.¹ Worldwide, by one estimate, premiums total more than five trillion dollars a year!² That's with a T. Five 'Trillion' dollars!

And even the pandemic has not slowed the business down. According to Forbes, the insurance sector was very profitable in 2020, in spite of the huge economic downturn; and 10% of the largest companies in the world were companies primarily in the insurance sector.³

And for lots of good reasons. We insure our homes; and our cars; our health care; and even our lives. Just in case. Just in case something goes wrong.

And we are invited, every time that we buy some new piece of technology; [we are invited] to buy all kinds of extended warranties. Another kind of insurance; something to guarantee our purchase, just in case. Just in case that new thing fails to work properly; or even fails to work at all.

And perhaps you carefully read all the labels at the grocery store, trying to avoid the kinds of things that those who know more than we do about healthy eating tell us that we should avoid. Just in case. Just in case they're something lurking inside that package that might hurt us. And parents try to teach their kids how to make the very best decisions; how to choose wisely; how to avoid the risks that inevitably come with growing up. Just in case.

But for all of our efforts, as wise and prudent as we can try to be; for all that we do to reduce risk and prepare for an uncertain future, there's really only one guarantee in life; and that is – that there really are no real guarantees. We all know that, don't we? We can make all the right decisions; we can be as careful as we possibly can; we can educate ourselves; we can discipline our wishes and our wants; but sometimes things come at us for no apparent reason; with absolutely no warning at all.

It's not fair; it's not even close to fair. But sometimes things happen no matter how careful, no matter how prudent, we try to be. Because this incredibly beautiful sphere that is our current home cannot offer us any lasting guarantees. It's just not possible. And anyone who tries to tell you otherwise is only offering us the emptiest of empty promises; a conjuror's trick to deceive the fearful and the desperate.

The desperate, like of that poor father in this week's Gospel.

Maybe at one time or another you've experienced that kind of desperation; because of something that threatened you; or threatened someone that you loved.

This man's desperation driven by the unimaginable possibility that his son might die; a son who, clearly, is very dear to him. Sir, come down, before my child dies!" Words of incredible honesty and pain.

But in this week's Gospel, this same weary, fearful, worried, even desperate,

¹ http://assets.ibc.ca/Documents/Facts%20Book/Facts_Book/2021/IBC-2021-Facts-Section-one.pdf

² <https://www.statista.com/statistics/273156/gross-premiums-generated-by-the-insurance-industry-worldwide-since-2006/>

³ <https://www.insurancebusinessmag.com/ca/news/breaking-news/insurance-organizations-among-worlds-largest-companies-255055.aspx>

man does a remarkable thing. He turns around and goes home. He takes on faith the word that Jesus tells him. Even though he's from a different tribe; even though he worships a different god, he believes the word that Jesus tells him. On faith. He assumes in advance that his son, who is at the point of death, will be well; that everything will be ok; just because Jesus said it would be so. Having travelled from Capernaum to Cana to plead with Christ; having been driven by fear and desperation, with more than little panic thrown in, he then turns around goes home; with none of that panic and none of that fear, solely because Christ told him that it would be alright spoken; solely on the promise that Christ made to him. Even before he knows the outcome.

That's the kind of shield that St. Paul is talking about in this week's Epistle. The Shield of Faith. Not something that will magically shelter us from all of uncertainty of an incredibly uncertain world; but something that allows us to see past our immediate struggles; to see through our trials and fears; and know that God is with us no matter what comes; a faith that equips us to face any fear, because we know as surely as we know anything else that Christ fights all these battles with us. Not a guarantee that things won't come that we neither desire nor deserve. But the peace that comes from knowing that God is our defense; and our hope, no matter what comes.

Both this week's Old Testament Lesson and Epistle warn us not to mistake our enemy; That we are not wrestling against flesh and blood; whomever or whatever we imagine that enemy might be. Both this week's Old Testament Lesson and Epistle remind us that our real battle is a spiritual battle – in our hearts - against hatred and despair and fear and hopelessness; and in the world - against darkness and evil and oppression and injustice.

And in that battle we are called by Christ to be peacekeepers. To speak words that heal rather than divide. To offer forgiveness in the face of sin. To offer hope in the face of despair; and comfort in the face of sorrow.

Moment by moment we face the possibility of having our lives turned upside in the blink of an eye: a diagnosis from our doctor; a call to the office by our boss; a night time knock at the door by the police; a note from our spouse. At times it seems that the only certainty in life is that there are no certainties. We can buy all the insurance we want; and all the warranties we're offered; but none of that will change the reality that there are no guarantees that dark days will not come.

But Philip Yancey says that: Faith means believing in advance what will only make sense in reverse.⁴ And only by faith can we find the power to face all of the things that can bring sorrow and grief and fear and suffering and trial; because, by faith, we believe and trust in the God who has promised us healing and hope: by faith we believe now what we'll one day know for sure.

By faith, we believe in a mercy greater than our sin, in healing greater than all sickness, in forgiveness greater than our brokenness, and in love stronger than death.

So, be strong, as St. Paul reminds us. Be strong, no matter what comes; No matter what you face.

Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

⁴ Philip Yancey, *Disappointment with God*, page 224.